



# The Human Services Workforce Initiative

MULTIPLE WORKFORCES

## *The Organizational Effectiveness Institute:*

*Lessons Learned in Implementing a Training Program for Human Services Leaders*



Prepared by the  
American Public Human Services Association

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**The Organizational Effectiveness Institute:  
Building the 21st Century Workforce  
Lessons Learned in Implementing a Training Program  
for Human Services Leaders**

**American Public Human Services Association  
Washington, DC**

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## Cornerstones for Kids Introduction

The Human Services Workforce Initiative (HSWI) is focused on the frontline workers serving vulnerable children and families. HSWI's premise is that human services matter. Delivered well, they can, and do, positively impact the lives of vulnerable children and families, often at critical points in their lives.

We believe that the quality of the frontline worker influences the effectiveness of services they deliver to children and families. If workers are well-trained and supported, have access to the resources that they need, possess a reasonable workload and are valued by their employers, it follows that they will be able to effectively perform their jobs. If, however, they are as vulnerable as the children and families that they serve, they will be ineffective in improving outcomes for children and families.

Unfortunately, all indications today are that our frontline human services workforce is struggling. In some instances poor compensation contributes to excessive turnover; in others an unreasonable workload and endless paperwork renders otherwise capable staff ineffective; and keeping morale up is difficult in the human services fields and it is remarkable that so many human services professionals stick to it, year after year.

HSWI's mission is to work with others to raise the visibility of, and sense of urgency about, workforce issues. Through a series of publications and other communications efforts we hope to:

- Call greater attention to workforce issues.
- Help to describe and define the status of the human services workforce.
- Disseminate data on current conditions.
- Highlight best and promising practices.
- Suggest systemic and policy actions which can make a deep, long term difference.

Currently the field has enough information about weaknesses in the human services workforce and strategies that work to strengthen it to suggest promising practices for public and private human services agencies working to increase their workforce capacity. The American Public Human Services Association designed and implemented a multi-session Workforce Development Institute in order to assist agencies in putting these promising approaches into practice. This report describes the lessons learned in the process of engaging and training human services administrators in effecting change in the workforce functions of their agencies.

Additional information on the human services workforce, and on HSWI, is available at [www.cornerstones4kids.org](http://www.cornerstones4kids.org).

Cornerstones for Kids, 2006

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## INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

### Overview

Between May 2006 and June 2007, the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) organized the Organizational Effectiveness Institute: Building the 21st Century Workforce (Workforce Institute). The Workforce Institute brought together executives from nine public human services agencies. The institute's aim was to help participants strengthen their agencies' workforce and human resources functional capacity. The jurisdictions represented were Arizona, California, Idaho, Los Angeles, New York State, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington, DC, and Washington State. The institute was comprised of the following four in-person sessions with participant work and consulting support in between:

- Session I: Seattle, WA (May 25 & 26, 2006)
- Session II: Chicago, IL (October 19 & 20, 2006)
- Session III: Phoenix, AZ (November 30 & December 1, 2006)
- Session IV: Washington, DC (June 21 & 22, 2007)

### Rationale

APHSA organized the Workforce Institute for four main reasons. First, our members have been citing workforce capacity problems as one of the areas of operation most critically in need of improvement. Many of our agencies have related to us their difficulties with high turnover, weak or unclear staff performance levels, questionable staff motivations and values, trust breakdowns between staff, supervisors, and upper management, and a limited bench of qualified future leaders. They understand that without strong workforce capacity, they cannot deliver effective products and services to their clients.

Second, we viewed the services available to our members to help them address these difficulties as typically too expensive, too conceptual, or too "classroom-oriented," separated too far in both content and method from members' specific needs and circumstances. We felt that we could deliver a developmental program at a lower cost and with greater impact on their real work.

Third, we felt that our members were in serious need of a **systematic and systemic** approach to making workforce capacity improvements to help them move beyond one-trick solutions to workforce-related problems that do not drive meaningful and lasting change.

Fourth, we could find no model or approach to serving our members that met the test of providing both an organized flow of action steps and a big picture-orientation. We also felt that we were in an ideal position to help our members in this area, as we had in place the core competencies and successful consulting experiences with other clients upon which to draw. So we developed and delivered such an approach ourselves.

## **Objective and Design Principles**

The Institute's objective was to help human services executives maximize their agencies' workforce and human resources functional capacity by:

- Learning and “internalizing” new models, frameworks, and tools for application past the life of the Institute;
- Conducting in-depth assessment of current capacity;
- Driving rapid change;
- Planning and preparing to drive systematic and systemic change; and,
- Building a network of like-minded peers committed to supporting one another and sharing information past the life of the Institute.

The Institute design was guided by an overarching principle that adult professionals learn best by working on real world problems and through taking action, reflecting, taking action, reflecting, etc. and not through “one shot training” interventions ([see Kolb and Argyris Models in Appendix A](#)).

We also designed the Institute content to give “equal billing” to relationship-based factors (e.g., communication, teaming, values) and task-based factors (e.g., planning, measurement, data and analysis) in organizational performance. Our experience, as well as a broad range of research, suggests that agencies proficient in both areas of work generally sustain higher levels of performance when compared with agencies strong in one area and weaker in the other ([see Tschannen-Moran's Model for Trust and a model of Relationship/Task Balance in Appendix A](#)).

Finally, the Institute was designed to impart both a systematic method for continuous improvement ([see the DAPIM model in Appendix A](#)) and a systemic model for understanding the interrelated parts of workforce and HR functional capacity and their context in an overall organizational system. In this area as well, experience and research support the premise that organizations able to both make connections across all aspects of organizational work and plan and execute systematically achieve high levels of performance and sustain this performance over time ([see the Capacity Pyramid and Organizational System models in Appendix A](#)).

## **Specific Design Elements and Flow**

The Institute was structured around three in-person sessions of two days each, held in May, October, and December of 2006. At the request of most participants, a fourth “reunion” session was held in June of 2007. Intersession consulting support was provided on an as-needed basis, and the use of this support varied widely by participant (see below). Session methods were structured heavily towards preparing participants to “learn by doing” real work back in their agencies. While participants were introduced to a set of tools and models developed by APHSA faculty through extensive field consulting, the sessions were shaped towards faculty serving more as facilitators of group dialogue than as resident experts.

Institute participants were expected to accomplish three concrete work products:

- A comprehensive workforce and HR capacity assessment

- A rapid change plan
- A comprehensive, long-term change plan with a supporting presentation

Materials provided to Institute participants included pre-readings, theoretical models and descriptive content in PowerPoint, and tools/templates for assessment, change planning, retention and knowledge management, and project implementation and monitoring.

Three faculty members were involved throughout the sessions, rotating by module into lead facilitator, support facilitator and observer roles. In the third session, a guest CEO (Rita Saenz, a past CEO from California) was used for the participants' final presentations.

The Institute's flow was as follows:

1. Session I (May '06): Conceptual grounding and preparation of participants to complete rapid change plans and comprehensive assessments.
2. Intersession: Rapid change planning and implementation support; phone/in-person consulting to "learn by doing" the comprehensive assessments and installation of project teams to help complete the Institute's work.
3. Session II (October '06): Debrief of work done and the related experience; preparation of participants to translate assessment data into findings, then into priorities and root causes, and finally into general remedies and change plans; discussions of special topics relevant to all participants' change plans—retention, knowledge management, and persuasion of executive decision-makers.
4. Intersession: Continue rapid change implementation; phone/in-person consulting to "learn by doing" a systematic and systemic change plan.
5. Session III (November/December '06): Presentations of change plans to a mock CEO; debrief with CEO and participants; discussions and tools for implementation and monitoring plan progress and impact.
6. Intersession: Begin change plan implementation; phone/in-person consulting to support implementation and monitoring.
7. Session IV (June '07): Discussions of progress in implementation and monitoring—key successes, challenges and ways to overcome them, next steps and strategies for completing them successfully.

Intersession consulting was provided as requested by participants and diagnosed by consultants. It was designed to vary by type (in person or by phone/email), frequency, intensity, and area of need or focus.

### **Desired Institute Participants**

We targeted senior human services executives with responsibility for workforce strategy and the authority to charter work and drive change. We wanted to attract a combination of HR executives and program/general management executives. We were interested in having a mix of current "levels of readiness" to drive change in agency workforce and HR functional capacity. We were open to a mix of individual and team representation. Finally, we wanted no more than 15 individuals to attend



in order to keep the faculty-participant ratio below 1:5, as we had advertised in our marketing materials.

### **Process Review Design**

The purpose of reviewing this institute was threefold. First, we wanted to evaluate the effectiveness of the institute design and delivery, enabling both mid-course corrections and adjustments to future APHSA institutes. Second, we wanted to examine the links between participant “readiness” (see below), technical and consulting support, and the resulting impacts on the individuals and their organizations. Third, we wanted to share our lessons learned with a broader base of interested constituents so that they might benefit.

We used four methods of data collection:

- A written survey of the participants ([see Appendix B](#))
- Direct in-session observation of both participants and faculty by the faculty member serving as observer (rotating)
- Two structured telephone interviews with the participants
- Observations by faculty on intersession consulting and participant intersession challenges, work accomplished, and lessons learned. Each faculty member was assigned to three specific agencies for intersession collaboration and consulting

We considered the following general hypotheses:

- Participants would cluster by “readiness” levels or types. We did not know in advance what these levels would be, but we felt they would emerge by Session I.
- Participant readiness would impact the kinds of faculty support required to realize maximum gains from the institute. Again, we did not know in advance what the correlations between cluster and kind of support would be.
- The institute design would help participants do the following:
  - Learn and “internalize” organizing models, frameworks, and tools (i.e., using institute tools and concepts in their own way and couching related ideas in their own language)
  - Make rapid, “quick win” changes to their HR and workforce capacity
  - Identify their agencies’ strengths and needs and their root causes
  - Initiate group work and the use of project teams “back home” to help complete assessment and change-planning work
  - Secure stakeholder support and executive team buy-in
  - Develop change plans containing most or all of the important elements necessary for a complex organizational change process
  - Chart out and manage implementation of their change plans in reality, versus going through the motions or “talking a good game”

## **PROCESS REVIEW OBSERVATIONS**

### **Actual Institute Participants**

Institute participants generally matched the population envisioned in the institute design. We targeted senior human services executives with responsibility for workforce strategy and the authority to charter work and drive change, and all participants fit this description. Nine different jurisdictions (seven states and two major cities) were represented by a total of 17 executives. As three of these 17 were replacements and one participant dropped out, we had 13 or 14 participants “in the room” at any one time. Of the 17 participants, five were general management/non-HR executives. We were open to a mix of individual and team representation, and three of the nine jurisdictions that attended sent a team of participants.

We continue this section by describing the institute’s “bottom line” impact on these participants in each objective area noted above under “Objective and Design Principles” and then discuss in more detail observations related to each of our hypotheses.

### **“Internalizing” New Models, Frameworks, and Tools**

We have observed a range of evidence that participants internalized the institute’s models, frameworks, and tool. Our most significant observations include:

- A greater degree of ownership for identifying problems and implementing solutions, versus waiting for their internal clients to “tell them what they want.” This was significantly aided by providing the participants with a systematic approach to assessment and planning and systemic understanding of what their value to the organization is currently and could be in the future.
- A high degree of client inclusion in creating the change plans (working committees, in-depth feedback gathering, and advisory groups).
- A high degree of use of the tools we provided (especially the change planning template).
- An evolving understanding that root causes to problems are multi-faceted, requiring similarly complex solutions. For example, a recognition that high turnover is being driven by many organizational problems (supervision, workload, lack of strategic clarity, an autocratic culture, lack of basic work tools, etc.) led at least two of the participants away from using only pay increases or improved casework ratios to address high turnover.
- A greater confidence in their ability to make long-term changes happen through systematic planning. We observed that ambitious changes seemed much more “doable” for a number of participants once they identified how to properly phase, communicate about, monitor and make adjustments to, handle obstacles around, set up effective committees for, and sustain the energy for major change initiatives.
- A greater understanding of how building HR functional capacity at all levels relates to improving workforce capacity at all levels (see [APHSA’s Capacity Pyramid in Appendix A](#)). For example, we observed that many participants established change plan phases that

began with service and capacity improvements to the HR function itself, recognizing that a “seat at the table” for HR on strategic workforce topics required this foundational credibility be established first.

- An ability to adapt institute tools and methods to their agencies’ culture without losing their essence. For example, several participants reported using the APHSA-provided assessment as a “back pocket” guide for a multi-phase assessment process. They determined that their agencies were not ready for a “whole hog” assessment between Sessions I and II and that a phase I assessment targeted in areas of greatest energy would likely build buy-in for more comprehensive assessment down the line.

In an indication of the validity of this approach, one of the participants reported in Session IV that the agency was preparing to spearhead a next, more comprehensive round of assessment. As another example, APHSA actually enhanced its change planning template after recognizing the effectiveness of some participant adaptations.

- An enhanced perception of themselves as “change agents.” Two participants who appeared in Session I to be resisting the institute process declared in Session IV that they viewed themselves as change agents within their agency. In addition, a Session IV discussion helping one participant troubleshoot an environmental barrier to change plan implementation made clear that the participants believe organizational environments to be dynamic and view themselves as able to help bring about environmental changes.
- Use of the core “Pyramid” model to explain and advocate for the HR function. One participant reported that he has the “Pyramid” model up on a white board in the office and uses it frequently to explain to HR staff their roles and the ways their work “lower” on the pyramid will enable them to start working on desirable work “higher” on the pyramid. Another participant reports using the model explicitly to make a business case for increased investment in HR and general workforce capacity work.

### **Driving Rapid Changes**

All participants who did not drop out of the institute reported to us that even while the institute was still going on they were successfully making rapid changes within their HR functions and their organizations at large. Participants reported that successful early change-making improved their ability to engage internal clients in a mutual agenda, focus their own teams on tangible accomplishments, and begin to envision a broader, longer-term agenda for continuous improvement.

Rapid changes reported by participants include:

- Developing a succession planning guide for managers and supervisors
- Streamlining the hiring process and establishing specific client service standards for turnaround time. Starting evening HR processing schedules
- Revamping the content and functionality of the HR website
- Reorganizing the Benefits processing unit
- Establishing a quarterly HR newsletter and launching site visits

- Designating an “HR Ninja” tasked with troubleshooting major client “pain points” with HR processes and systems
- Establishing a “fast track” procedure for ergonomic equipment

The general criteria the participants used to select rapid changes included:

- Having the capacity to make these changes happen right now
- Increasing the visibility of the HR function and its value
- Responding to their clients’ “pain points,” often through reducing “red tape”
- Linking directly to the whole agencies’ strategic priorities in some way
- Improving general communication within the agency

### **Driving Systemic and Systematic Change**

While there was far more variance in the demonstrated results here than in the area of rapid change, **every participant but one has, through an organizational assessment and resulting change plan, secured approval to make significant, multi-year changes to HR and workforce capacity.**<sup>1</sup>

### ***Preparing to Drive Change***

We observed that most participants based their strategies and priorities for change on a systemic assessment of their agency’s current workforce and HR capacity ([see APHSA’s Assessment Tool in Appendix B](#)). Through root cause analysis, identification of general remedies, and a systematic change planning approach ([see APHSA’s Change Plan Template in Appendix B](#)) each participant developed a multi-year plan for making continuous improvements and presented it in Session III to the guest CEO. All participants reported to us that they have used the change plans and slide presentations in “real life” to build buy-in for and guide ongoing change efforts.

Long-term, multi-faceted improvement initiatives described in participants’ change plans included:

- Job-related skills development for classifications other than caseworkers and for non-technical as well as technical skills
- In-depth supervisor development, especially in regards to performance management
- Recruiting and retention programs (committed to by almost all the participants)
- Strategic performance management programs (e.g., linking all expectations of staff to agency strategies; measuring return-on-investment, etc.)
- The HR function’s own structure, roles, key processes, and performance measures (again, committed to by almost all the participants)

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<sup>1</sup> This count excludes the participant who dropped out of the Institute.

### ***Preliminary Results Driving Change***

We asked participants six months after Session III to describe their progress toward implementing their change plans. They reported the greatest gains in building their HR functions' own structure, roles, key processes, performance measures, image, and credibility. While they have made some significant gains in implementing other major initiatives (especially in the area of recruitment and retention), significant challenges have forced them to adjust many of their change plans' timelines. Their overall impressions, major successes, challenges, strategies to overcome challenges, and innovative activities to date are as follows:

#### **Overall Impressions**

Discussions with participants six months after Session III and more than a year after the institute began affirmed both that agencies can experience profound positive changes and that such changes rarely happen overnight. During session IV, participants coined a phrase—"Revolution through Evolution"—that summed up their general feelings of progress. While their gains appear incremental and in many cases look like "two steps forward, one step back" (or even "two steps forward, hold, one step forward, two steps back, hold..."), they report that these increments add up to some revolutionary changes, especially in the area of HR credibility and capacity.

Gains in HR credibility resulted from improved communication with internal clients, perceptions of HR as "having a plan," and HR being more interested in "getting to yes" versus saying "no" when faced with client requests. Preliminary impacts of these gains in credibility include increases in HR staffing and funding, as well as increased program ownership of and advocacy for investment in workforce capacity work (especially in the areas of recruitment and retention). These gains have the potential to further transform HR's capacity and its positive impact on the agencies' overall workforce capacity.

#### **Major Successes**

Participants reported "major wins" in the following areas:

- HR Structure Roles, Key Processes and Performance Measures
  - Secured approval for nine new HR staff positions out of twelve positions requested
  - Integrated HR and organizational development staff into a single unit dedicated to "put the right people in the right places with the right skills, in collaboration with others and motivated to drive performance"
  - Established service-level agreements with internal clients and put in place metrics to track adherence to the agreements
- Increased Program Ownership of Workforce Capacity Building
  - Executive team initiated a strategic workforce development program with HR, planning, and quality control staff as co-facilitators.
  - Program managers took ownership of a high-profile job fair that received extensive positive media coverage.

- Program executives have taken ownership of implementing within their divisions retention strategies piloted successfully with the administration division.
- Program executives have deputized staff to serve as classroom trainers.
- Program executives have championed pilots of learning-by-doing approach to supervisory development.
- Program executives have championed a redesign of performance management tools to incorporate the caseworker practice model (“Practice Wheel”) as their overall competency model.
- Enhanced Recruitment and Retention
  - Overhauled civil service exam administration process to make it more user-friendly and responsive to needs of both candidates and program staff
  - Overhauled an antiquated job classification system
  - Established service standards for internal communications around hiring

### Challenges & Strategies to Address Them

Participants have experienced challenges similar to those we see in many agencies with which we work. They have had some success in overcoming these challenges. Examples of challenges and strategies to overcome them include the following:

- **Challenge:** Getting HR and OD staff on the “same page.” In one agency the HR and OD functions engage in “turf battles” over ownership of staff selection and development; in another agency HR and OD staff are housed in the same function but “speak a different language” and view one another with suspicion and bewilderment (HR is seen as “in the box”; OD as “big dreamers,”).
- **Strategies:** One participant reports success using the institute’s “Pyramid” model to help staff members understand their and each others’ roles. Another participant has brought in a senior manager who oversees both departments to clarify roles and mediate disputes. This participant also intends to build trust and understanding by spearheading with the OD counterparts a project to develop an on-boarding program.
- **Challenge:** Breakdowns outside participants’ areas of control diverted focus and resources from their change efforts. For example, one participant reported that a poorly executed IT rollout caused a breakdown in their hiring processes and forced them to work “at the bottom of the pyramid” (i.e., troubleshooting HR client service rather than spearheading key process, leadership, or strategic initiatives).
- **Strategies:** The participant hired an e-recruiting expert who together with the “HR Ninja” identified workarounds to keep processes working while the new IT system was being corrected. At the same time, the participant reached out to internal clients and used the crisis to spearhead broad conversations regarding HR service level commitments and metrics.
- **Challenge:** Changes in executive staff overseeing HR hurt sponsorship of planned change efforts.

- **Strategies:** One participant reported continuing implementation of planned initiatives for which resources were already in place and support was strong among program managers. The participant then used an HR newsletter to communicate successful changes to maximize support and create a strong case for sponsorship of implementation of the remaining change initiatives.
- **Challenge:** Cutbacks in staff. Participants particularly reported severe cutbacks in training staff.
  - **Strategies:** One participant appealed successfully to program executives to deputize program staff to serve as classroom trainers. HR staff transformed their roles from classroom training delivery to curriculum development, training coordination, and “training the trainers.” Another participant aims to leverage increased HR credibility with internal clients (e.g., program executives) to secure advocacy for investment in more training and development resources.

### Sample of Specific Activities

Participants reported a number of specific activities that other agencies may wish to consider. Examples include the following:

- *Engage retired executives as low-cost or free consultants.* One participant reported inviting in a recently retired corporate CEO who expressed an interest in helping make state government an “employer of choice.” He sat in on management meetings, met with staff focus groups, and wrote a report for senior management with recommendations for ways to improve organizational communication and alignment between management and staff. He volunteered his time and has since recruited other former CEOs to volunteer to serve as advisors to management.
- *Designate an HR “Ninja.”* As noted above, one participant designated a staff member who has a particular gift from problem solving to serve as an “HR Ninja.” Her work troubleshooting IT and other process challenges led to a number of rapid changes that have boosted HR’s credibility with clients. Such a role can also serve to retain talented employees who might quickly become bored in more routinized roles.
- *Bring program executives into quarterly HR meetings.* One participant reports inviting program executives to question and answer sessions with HR staff to discuss how HR helps his or her division provide services to clients and how HR might serve the division more effectively. The participant reports that these sessions have helped HR staff understand how their work contributes to the “bottom line” of the agency and why it is important for each staff member to do high quality work. They have also helped HR build its credibility with internal clients.
- *Pilot innovations within HR and publicize results.* Too often, HR staff feel like “cobbler’s kids with no shoes,” working to bring enhanced processes and systems to their internal clients while not deriving benefits from them themselves. One participant reported the power of piloting innovations (e.g., retention strategies) within HR—the HR staff feels that they are agents of change in the agency versus guardians of the status quo; the kinks inherent in version 1.0 processes and systems can be worked out “within the family” rather

than with clients external to the unit; and when successful innovations are publicized, they can become desirable to internal clients who want to “keep up with the Joneses.”

- With input from program staff, *create and distribute an employee orientation checklist*. One participant chartered a cross-functional work team to create a dynamic employee orientation checklist that incorporates links to relevant resources. The checklist can be used by hiring managers and/or other unit staff to ensure that new staff members receive the information they need and have the tools they need to “hit the ground running.”

### **Establishing a Peer Group for Ongoing Support**

Coming into Session I, the institute’s participants were strangers. By the conclusion of the institute, they had become a network of professionals who share with each other questions, resources, and insights.

This coalescing as a peer group has manifested in a number of ways. At the conclusion of Session III, the participants requested an opportunity to meet again in person after four to six months to share experiences and support each others’ implementation efforts. Since Session III, participants have emailed the group questions and requests for information on five separate occasions. In each case, at least two participants responded to the requests with helpful information and resources. In total, six different participant jurisdictions have taken part in the email dialogue. At the conclusion of Session IV, participants requested APHSA set up an online bulletin board to share materials and carry on an ongoing dialogue, ideally not only with fellow institute participants but with the “OE Alumni” community at large.

APHSA is in the process of setting up the online bulletin board and is putting plans in place to expand peer networking capability to the entire “OE Alumni” community.

### **Hypothesis I: Participant Readiness**

Consistent with our hypothesis, we observed participants clustering by individual readiness to learn and drive change. We found participants within clusters exhibiting similar needs and desires for technical assistance and consulting; differences between clusters appeared significant. Further, the three participating teams exhibited consistent “team types,” which suggests these types might be prevalent within their broader agency cultures.

The five readiness clusters that emerged were:

1. **Learner** (two agency participants). These individuals, while expressing enthusiasm for the institute and its content, struggled the most to acquire new ways of thinking and techniques for getting things done. When checking in with them early on, we found that they could not demonstrate that they followed the material. They were usually quiet during group discussions but very attentive and supportive of their colleagues. They were dutiful in their commitments and expressed gratitude for any help they received.
2. **Well Rounded with a Conceptual Preference** (two agency participants). In contrast, these individuals demonstrated an understanding of new ideas and techniques with moderate effort. They took well-organized and imaginative approaches to thinking through things and were



engaged and influential in group discussions. However, they also exhibited a tendency towards being overly conceptual or systemic in their approaches. We observed that they saw most or all of the big picture implications or “interrelated moving parts” of discreet questions or topics, but often became somewhat fixated on that big picture instead of on getting things done.

3. **Well Rounded with a Systematic Preference** (two agency participants). These individuals demonstrated similar levels of learning capacity with the second cluster, but they were far more focused on accomplishing specific tasks in an orderly progression. They were most apt to request more specific instructions for doing things, and they often had trouble making connections between discreet topics and related ones. They preferred to keep learning confined to a specific area of work for which they were already committed.
4. **X-Learner** (two agency participants). These individuals were difficult to read or sent contradictory messages about their interest in learning and applying new ideas and techniques. They demonstrated good learning capacity but did not make their agenda or intentions clear in group discussions, sometimes deflecting conversations away from themselves and their own agencies, at other times signaling commitment and then not following through.
5. **Resister** (one agency participant). These individuals demonstrated the tendency to “manage the process” of the institute versus becoming engaged in the institute process itself. During general discussions, within breakout groups, and during break times their comments tended to focus on how the institute might be better organized and designed, without “trying it out” or committing their energies to it. Their capacity to learn new ideas and techniques were initially hard to observe because they were not engaged in doing so. Notably, this was the one category of learner who evolved to another category during the institute, in this case to Well Rounded Systematic.

## **Hypothesis 2: Impact of Readiness on TA Required and Participant Learning and Growth**

### ***TA Required***

The nature of intersession dialogue, technical advice, and consulting varied widely by readiness cluster. *Learners* required the most extensive, prescriptive, and consultant-directed support. For example, the faculty member assigned to one agency proposed onsite assistance, detailed the nature and scheduling of that assistance, helped the agency form a taskforce to accomplish the institute-related work, facilitated that work during three onsite sessions, and provided ongoing coaching to the taskforce project manager, all to the expressed delight of the institute participant. Learners appeared to require this level of specific support to begin converting their desires into change within their agencies.

Both *Well Rounded/Systematic* and *Well Rounded/Conceptual* participants required little intersession support, but for different reasons and with different challenges to the faculty. *Systematic* participants made intersession requests for assistance in a highly self-directed manner, but only for clarifications of expectations and process. The challenge for faculty was to use the initial basis for questions and requests as a “stepping off point” to help these participants make broader connections. For example, one agency began the institute process only interested in upgrading their recruiting function, but through in-depth phone consulting came to realize that their *retention strategy* was dependent on a multi-pronged approach.

*Conceptual* participants were equally self-directed, but seemed to use faculty discussions more as a basis to *delay actions on their part than as a method of moving actions along*. For example, one agency set up scheduled appointments to check in with faculty only to use them for highly conceptual topics of interest. The challenge for faculty was to assert the institute expectations without creating defensiveness. Once this was achieved, these participants were able to dispense with “admiring problems” and get on with the work at hand with minimal assistance.

*X-Learners and Resisters* each required moderate levels of intersession support, but again for different reasons and with different faculty challenges. In each case, intersession interactions with these clusters were consultant-driven, and they were more openly challenging of the participants’ commitment and intentions than in the other clusters.

For *X-Learners*, the faculty challenge was to help the participant *move out of that category* by identifying their level of commitment and intentions openly, which we found difficult to accomplish. One *X-Learner* reported that, due to family and personal issues, he could not muster the commitment to move successfully through the institute work. This led to replacement by a colleague, who we believe would have been a *Learner* but for the fact that we exempted him from institute deliverables. Another *X-Learner* never revealed the reasons for her lack of follow-through despite a number of attempts by faculty.

For *Resisters*, the faculty challenge was to openly discuss and then agree with the participant about the participant’s behavior being resistant, then consider the root cause, and then determine the right remedy, including withdrawing from the institute altogether. One agency was used to attending seminar-like institutes that required very little deliverable work and was surprised that institute participants were held accountable for completing concrete deliverables. But once the participants realized the benefits of doing the work, they became more accepting of the institute process and design as a whole and performed well from that point forward.

### ***Participant Learning and Growth***

Participants’ learning and growth over the course of the institute also varied by readiness cluster. *Learners’* observed growth was largely in the area of appreciation of the importance of and articulation of effective workforce change practices. These participants struggled with the more conceptual and “deductive” Session I and thrived during the more “inductive” and “hands-on” Sessions II and III, during which they participated more actively in group discussions and spoke with greater confidence. These participants, however, were observed to struggle to apply these concepts in practice without extensive consulting support and heavy reliance on capable task forces back home.

*Well Rounded/Systematic* participants became more articulate regarding the ways different “moving parts” of a multi-pronged change effort work together for maximum impact. Unlike *Learners*, they personally converted their growth into improved approaches back at home. This growth was apparently triggered by dialogue with both peers and faculty during and after Session I, as well as by the pressure and challenge of presenting their work to a CEO in Session III.

*Well Rounded/Conceptual* participants began to use the institute to perform and troubleshoot real-world work rather than treating the institute as an academic exercise and opportunity to showcase work done to date. This took until Session III to become apparent, triggered by the pressure and challenge of presenting to a CEO.

The *X-Learner* participants were the ones who dropped out of the institute completely. One did so after Session I (see above example), and one did so “passively” by simply not attending sessions after committing to do so.

*Resisters* became less resistant as the institute moved along. By Session III they were more constructively engaged and were accomplishing their intersession work, essentially shifting their “type” to *Well Rounded/Systematic*. Apparent triggers included a) discussions with faculty, b) heightened expectations from their executive sponsor, c) replacement of one of their two participants with a highly systematic “doer,” and d) the pressure of presenting to a CEO.

Of general note, by Session II it was clear that all participants who engaged cross-functional working teams within their agencies to assist them in accomplishing the institute tasks advanced their work far more effectively than those who did not. Further, the more the working group contributed to the core assessment/planning work, the more the participant thrived.

We had greater turnover among individual participants than expected. The overall impact of turnover was, however, beneficial to the group and to the effectiveness of the participant teams. Three individuals who attended Session I were replaced for Sessions II and III by others within the same agency. In each of these cases, the Session I individual was replaced by someone who showed greater readiness for individual learning, project management, and the benefits of organizational change. A fourth individual, who attended part of Session I, left for a pre-planned family occasion and, despite committing to do so in each case, never attended subsequent sessions.

### **Hypothesis III: Impact of Institute Design on Participant Learning and Growth**

We found that participants in general appeared to struggle the most with Session I and were more comfortable following Sessions II and III. Discussion was more labored during Session I; body language was more “closed” (e.g., arms crossed, frowns); and participants expressed the most frustration during dialogue with faculty during the session and during structured interviews and consulting dialogues following the session. Session I was the most deductive and expert-driven in its pedagogy; it was also the most “dense” session, having the fewest breaks and the least unstructured time.

We observed all participants struggling to get started with their comprehensive assessment. In structured interviews, intersession consulting dialogue, and dialogue during Session II, we found that participants struggled to understand the importance of the assessment to later change-planning work. In particular, they struggled to understand how data could be translated into findings and actionable root causes. Once this content was delivered in Session II, we observed “light bulbs going on” for participants as they gained a line of sight between the assessment and work on concrete change. Participants also communicated with us during structured interviews following Session II and during a debrief/feedback discussion during Session III that the long time between

Sessions I and II led to a lack of urgency to get started right away on assessment work following Session I.

We also observed participants being slow to charter teams to help them complete their assessment and in some cases struggling to complete this chartering work. Session I did not contain explicit content about how to set up and use a task force back home—those instructions were given later as part of intersession consulting.

We found that the institute’s core models and guiding principles resonated with participants. In Session II, for example, a number of participants referred unprompted to the Capacity Pyramid model in describing their assessment experiences and analysis processes. And in a debrief/feedback conversation during Session III, participants recommended that in future institutes we use the models as “touchstones” in Sessions II and III even more explicitly than we did in this institute to reinforce the models and keep them “front and center” in the mind.

We found that having a faculty team conduct the sessions, versus a single trainer or facilitator, appeared to work well:

- Different styles of facilitation appeared to keep sessions from getting “stale.”
- Different roles kept facilitators fresh and able to make mid-course corrections to their respective facilitation approaches and agendas.

We found that the participants as a group cohered well over the course of the institute. Session III was the most open and lively in terms of participants providing each other feedback. Participants received this feedback without signaling any defensiveness at all. They will also be staying in touch with each other through email and strongly wish to reconvene for a Session IV update and review.

As stated earlier in this report and likely our most significant finding in that by Session III **all participants still active in the institute were using it to make real world changes and improvements within their agencies.**

## PROCESS REVIEW CONCLUSIONS

**Conclusion I: In “short and sweet” terms, the following steps appear most important for helping agency leaders move an organization forward:**

- Use a small core of conceptual models to build a “common language,” to organize thinking, and to provide a general approach around change management and organizational excellence. In the case of this institute, these models were most useful:
  - APHSA’s DAPIM Model for Continuous Improvement
  - APHSA’s Relationship-Task Balance Model
  - APHSA’s Capacity Pyramid Model for Workforce and HR Functions
  - Kolb’s Learning by Doing Model for Professional Development
- Build open, honest dialogue up, down, and across agencies, based on commitment to clear-eyed assessment and well-organized continuous improvement programs

- Build the same type of open, honest dialogue between agencies and their outside environments
- Charter and deploy cross-functional work teams staffed with a broad range of skills and perspectives in:
  - Project management
  - Group facilitation
  - Communication
  - Archiving
  - Technical/functional expertise
  - Political/bureaucratic skill
  - Interpersonal expertise
  - Systems thinking
- Secure and maintain executive sponsorship
- Champion change in word and deed
- Put money (and in-kind resources/time/capacity) where the agency's mouth is
- Continue sponsorship of worthy ongoing efforts when there's a change in leadership

Agencies that follow these steps will help key staff and leaders maximize their readiness for change by expanding their thinking about the real challenges they face and practicing with new tools in the “real world” context of their day-to-day work.

**Conclusion II: To have maximum impact on client agencies, consultants working with agencies to design and implement change efforts need to:**

- Understand the role of organizational context in customizing change efforts (i.e., not expect that “one size fits all” and/or adhere single-mindedly to a particular philosophy or “guru”).
- Provide solid functional/technical competence in human services, public management, and workforce capacity issues. While they do not need to be a world-class technical/functional expert in all areas, they need to be conversant with the basic concepts, frameworks, and common challenges and opportunities of these respective fields.
- Provide solid project management skills and experience, especially in chartering and managing cross-functional groups to get specific work done. While this seems self-evident, many consultants do not possess these skills.
- Provide expert “inductive and dynamic” group facilitation. Consultants need to “organically” guide discussion and learning in response to real-time cues from individuals and groups, making decisions in the moment regarding language to use, direction of discussion, how hard to push for participation, when to affirm and when to challenge, when to “drill down” on a learning point and when to move on, etc.

- Have “tough conversations” as needed with people who are resisting action the consultant is guiding.
- Facilitate group work from the “inside-out,” identifying clients’ initial topical focus and through helping them improve in these specific areas help them connect to broader ideas. Consultants doing this need to:
  - Focus initial discussions and active learning in those areas where participants’ energy and comfort is high, and then
  - Expand the scope of dialogue and activity into accord with models and frameworks held in the consultant’s head, and eventually
  - Put those models and frameworks “on the table” once they are helpful to further deepen the understanding that participants are already developing in their own way.

### **Conclusion III: Organizational consulting and TA work best when they are tailored to particular clients’ levels of readiness.**

For *Learner* organizations, group/peer “learning by doing” activities, plus intensive, one-to-one consulting are most appropriate to help them move forward. A strong project team is critical and effective staffing, chartering, launch, and management of the team is a heavy consulting emphasis.

For *Well Rounded/Systematic* organizations, group/peer “learning by doing” activities such as this institute will serve them well.

For *X Learner, Resistant, and Well Rounded/Conceptual* organizations: group/peer “learning by doing” activities, plus one-to-one “tough love” dialogues with faculty to help them identify the root causes of their resistance, passive duplicity, or lack of action-orientation, are most appropriate to help them move forward.

For all readiness clusters, a critical resource can be the one-to-one coaching of change agents within agencies, helping them troubleshoot organizational/environmental obstacles; charter, deploy, and manage sponsor and project teams; expand their thinking about ways to get things done; and develop useful language to “sell” change to internal and/or external stakeholders.

### **Conclusion IV: Agencies’ capacity to assess and overcome obstacles to change must be enhanced at both the individual and institutional level.**

Individuals working in cross-functional groups can help generate creative solutions to obstacles. Their previous individual and collective successes in the face of obstacles lead to generating tools and models for replication and reinforcement.

Individuals need to learn how to influence executives—understanding how they need to hear information (e.g., level of detail, tolerance/desire for data and models, framing in terms of return on investment) and be able to secure understanding, buy-in, and active sponsorship from them.

Institutional sponsorship for making changes and improvements is always a critical success factor, coming typically through formal executive team support and involvement. Stable and strategic

leadership at the top of agencies, committed to continuous improvement in general, is a major success factor. In contrast, a change in leadership toward more strategic and continuous improvement orientation, e.g., a new and progressive CEO, can bring new expectations for systemic and systematic effectiveness. Experience with “turnarounds” at other organizations, etc., can be an even more powerful success factor, depending on the particular agency context.

Institutions appear most receptive to fundamental change when they feel that they’re on a “burning platform,” i.e., experience an environmental crisis (e.g., child death, court injunction) or struggle with significant workforce problems (e.g., unsustainably high turnover, “revolving door” at the top).

**Conclusion V: An institute model with the principles and design elements we provide here, combined with on-site technical assistance and “effective” consultation as needed, can have the desired impact on agency change.**

The institute model appears effective at serving a range of participants. While we identified some minor enhancements—e.g., add content regarding findings and chartering group work to Session I, add more unstructured time to session agendas to allow participants to network and “recharge batteries”—we found that the institute model held up well as designed.

We noted above that participants struggled somewhat with the deductive and content-heavy Session I. Looking back across the whole institute, however, we do not conclude that Session I requires an overhaul, as the struggles observed during and immediately following Session I did not correlate with subsequent struggles. In fact:

- Participants who were the most “unsettled” after Session I made the greatest strides over the course of the institute.
- The two participants who dropped either part-way or completely out of Session I were not the participants most unsettled; we observed that they were quite comfortable during the first Session.
- Following Session III, participants provided feedback that it would have been helpful to use the organizing models and tools introduced in Session I more frequently and explicitly as a touchstone in Sessions II and III. Participants validated the usefulness and helpfulness of these models and tools despite initially being uncomfortable with them.

Our overall conclusion is that using Session I to challenge and ground participants in new ways of thinking and organizing their work may have “rocked their foundation” a bit and led to less-than-glowing initial reviews, but it may also have set the foundation for a powerful overall institute experience. This conclusion may have provocative implications for trainers, TA providers, and consultants.

We also, however, found that a more “inductive” approach to introducing models and tools appears powerful. In Sessions II and III we often spent time brainstorming with the group about a particular topic, such as retention, only to provide them with a tool at the end of the module that reflected their needs and views. We also used this technique when introducing the change plan template and actually made changes to the template based on participants’ insights. We conclude that:

- Participants' input based on the knowledge and experience they bring to the group can lead to enhancements in tools, reinforce "good" theoretical models, and generally enrich the learning environment for both faculty and participants.
- Participants' active grounding of model elements in their experience through group dialogue and brainstorming enhances their buy-in and understanding.
- When this grounding occurs, participants are more likely to accomplish intersession tasks and accountabilities. For example, participants struggled with accomplishing the organizational assessment (Session I) far more than in developing their change plans (Session II). When we probed them about this difference, they reported that they struggled to understand the importance of assessment to organizational effectiveness, with literally how to get started, and with how to pull together a task force to help complete the assessment.

Our overall conclusion, therefore, is that challenging participants in Session I can be beneficial and that the greatest benefit is likely to be derived from taking a more inductive approach to introducing core models and concepts than we took in Session I of this institute.

### **What's next for the participating organizations?**

As mentioned earlier, all of the institute participants but one are working with a systematic and systemic method to continuously improve HR and workforce capacity. They have all made rapid, "quick win" changes and have begun making longer-term, multi-faceted ones.

In a couple of cases, longer-term initiatives require those agencies to use further outside expertise, such as training service providers or recruitment and staffing consultants, but that was not a common outcome of the institute. Most are building the capacity of their HR functions, adding higher-level roles and skills, including project management and internal consulting and facilitation.

All of the participants attending the reunion session in June 2007 committed to staying connected via email and an online bulletin board set up at their request. Building on the momentum from intersession peer-to-peer technical assistance via email and the reunion session dialogue, they aim to continue to learn from each other and support each other to keep their energy levels high.

### **What's next for APHSA?**

While most of the design principles and elements we employed in our inaugural institute worked well for our participants, we feel that we learned as much from them as they did from us and have identified a number of redesign areas for future APHSA institutes.

First, we will spend more time in Session I teaching "inductively" about analyzing data and generating defensible findings from that data. In this institute we focused far more time on the specific content of the assessment tool and came to realize that the participants struggled more with the fundamental issues of assessment-driven data collection and analysis as a process.



Second, we will revisit the “big picture” models introduced in Session I more frequently during the subsequent sessions, reinforcing how they are “showing up” in the ongoing work and how they can be used to make one’s case to executives who are very interested in that big picture.

Third, we will integrate ongoing support for peer-to-peer contact into the designs of future institutes. Going into the Workforce Institute, we did not know the extent to which participants would wish to stay connected with each other, with APHSA, and with other “alums” of APHSA’s organizational effectiveness work. Participants’ eagerness to stay connected, signaled both by the clamor for a fourth “reunion” session and the extent of unprompted email communications among participants following the conclusion of Session III, tells us that an opportunity exists to foster a cadre of agencies doing leading-edge organizational work.

We will also:

- Be clearer with prospective participants about what work they will be expected to accomplish
- Identify participant readiness more rapidly and respond in the appropriate ways
- Set the time between sessions at no less than five weeks and no more than eight weeks
- Schedule more breaks and unstructured time into Session I
- Be clearer in Session I about the benefits of establishing a working team “back home” and strategies for staffing, chartering, launching, and managing working teams

In third/fourth quarter 2007 we will launch an institute for senior child welfare executives and mid-managers in a major state focusing on managing performance and measuring outcomes. We intend to hold future workforce and HR institutes as well, both for individual clients and “general admission.” As a result of this process review, we will do so with greater confidence and skill.

In closing, we continue to be concerned that many of our member agencies still struggle to build and maintain the workforce capacity they need, despite making substantial investments in “classroom-oriented” professional development. Based on our institute findings as well as many direct consulting experiences guiding agencies to “learn by doing,” we now have a working hypothesis that most current technical assistance and training services, and the ways their impacts are measured, are not sufficiently effective. In our consulting practice, institutes, other products and services, and in future reviews of this nature, we will actively aim to advance the design and delivery of professional development programs in general.